

THE PATH OF SOUND

A Visit to The Monroe Institute

by Stephan A. Schwartz

If I'm lucky, sometime in the next four days I'll have an out-of-body experience. It will happen as part of a training program called Gateway Voyage at the Monroe Institute outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. The trip there takes me into the deep green foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and, as the country road unwinds in front of me, images of Institute Founder Bob Monroe, who died in 1995, flood my mind. I have not been back here in 23 years.

Although he owned a thriving cable broadcasting business, and had worked in Manhattan for decades, Bob had a country haircut and looked like a rural judge. Cranky yet avuncular, he was an unusual mix of tolerance and toughness; suspenders and belt worn together marked him as a man who wanted to know for sure. When I first met him in 1970, he was in late middle age, had long been successful in both the radio and television business, and was an avid pilot. But none of that mattered much to him anymore because, of something that happened one morning in 1956. As he explained it: "I was lying in bed thinking what a nice day Saturday was going to be. I was going up to my gliding club, and a cold front had come through, and that meant the lift would be tremendous. I began to feel this vibration and, the next thing I knew, there was this thing I was lying on, and it was a stalk that looked like something coming out of a fountain and, then, I realized I was up on the ceiling. Now I know what this is; it's the chandelier. So I slammed back down and I'm back into my body. It scared me, and I was very careful about this vibration after that. I asked all over, and found some people who said they knew about out-of-body experiences, but no one seemed to know very much about how it happened. Suppressing it got irritating and I thought, lets see where it goes."

With characteristic entrepreneurial zeal, and a willingness to spend his own time and money, Bob began his search for answers. He sold his business interests, built a sleep laboratory on the grounds of his farm, and recruited volunteers to explore what today are called Altered States of Consciousness (ASCs). Because of his radio background, he knew that people are highly suggestible to sound, and this became the stimulus he studied. Soon, with the help of his test

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subjects, he discovered that certain sound patterns seemed to alter brain waves to produce predictable responses. Certain sounds produced relaxation, others sleep, or alertness. But what interested Bob the most, were those sounds that led people to experience states of expanded awareness. By the time we met he was completing his first book, *Journeys Out of the Body* and, after years of experimentation, was about ready to begin a training program to teach what he had learned. I was very interested to hear about his work, and he seemed equally interested to learn about my academic research in parapsychology. I was happy to volunteer to be one of his "lab rats".

Passing a junction with another country road, I remember a night when I took that turn and helped Bob put on one of his first training seminars.

He had rented two rooms at the Tuckahoe Motel; in one, twelve people lay on the floor. The beds were gone and they were in sleeping bags, on air mattresses, feet pointing in towards the center of the circle, as still as corpses. On each face was a sleeping mask. On each head a pair of expensive headphones. In the other room, Bob was hunched forward over his tape decks, wires snaking every which way, a microphone in his hand. The outside doors were open and, to minimize insects, and reduce sensory stimulation as much as possible, the lights were off. Guided by moonlight and neon glow of the motel sign, I walked over to the doorway between the rooms. Bob was telling the people to collectively form a ball of red energy in the middle of the circle. At first nothing happened. Then, slowly, a flickering dim red color formed, disappeared, re-formed, and held. It didn't last long, about four beats. But for that brief time, the red ball was visible to me, as ephemeral as swamp gas. I was stunned

I see a little white sign. It says, "The Monroe Institute", and I turn onto the property.

Up a narrow paved road, sitting in the middle of maybe 800 acres, is what looks like a ski lodge complex. The view across the mountains is magical. The land is still a working farm, and huge hay rounds wait in the hot afternoon to be picked up from the hillside fields. The largest building is The Nancy Penn Center, named for Bob's wife, who died in 1992. The entry hall ends in a mezzanine looking down onto the floor below, where a number of people are already meeting. Diana, a pleasant woman in her forties holding a clipboard checks me in. We will be 25 for the week, she tells me, as she shows me where I will be staying. Walking along, I can see the rooms have, instead of beds, two or three strange sleeping booths, rather like old-fashioned Pullman railway berths, built along the walls. In an older part of the building, some rooms, including mine, are singles.

It is truly tiny, about the size of a guest closet. A space for something unusual, not a bedroom. Just big enough for a single bed and a medicine chest sized cabinet. Bob named these little spaces CHEC (pronounced "Check") Units, for Controlled Holistic Environmental Chamber. Always wary of overtly metaphysical words, and fearful of mis-using scientific ones, he tended to coin phrases to explain what he was doing. The ceiling of the CHEC Unit is painted black, the walls are buff. Over the head of the bed is a wooden light box painted black. As I play with the switches I discover that it has three lights, in the three primary colors, red, yellow, and blue. There are headphones on the pillow, and a control panel for sound and light built into the wall, where it can be reached in the dark. It's a long way from sleeping bags, and air mattresses.

Back upstairs. There is Ulrich from Munich, a great bear of a man, who owns a computer programming company, and slender Jennifer from San Francisco, who is an analyst for the Federal Reserve. Mike is a musician from Memphis; rugged Gene, who looks like a model, comes out of a private security background in Switzerland. Amy, from a town in Ohio, is in computers.

Everyone is congenial but there is something odd about this group, and it takes me a moment to figure it out. Typically any consciousness movement gathering is overwhelmingly -- usually about 80 per cent -- Caucasian and female. I don't think I have ever been in a mixed-gender consciousness group where there were more men than women, but that is what we have here. Including myself, we are sixteen and nine. But there is something else: Twelve per cent of us, exactly mirroring the national demographic, are African-Americans, two men and a woman, Bernard, Xavier, and Trina.. This surprises me as much as the predominance of men. But that isn't the end of it.

Amy, I soon discover, is not the exception but the rule amongst the women who, with two exceptions, are all in finance, business, or computers. Most of the men also come from these same backgrounds, which isn't so surprising, but the fact that two of the men work with their hands is; you don't see a lot of heavy equipment operators at personal growth seminars. Both Black men are double anomalies; they are Christian ministers and one, Bernard, a charismatic man with a shaved head, is a Bishop.

What is it about the Monroe Institute, that it breaks the typical New Age mold? What is the pull that draws these people?

The others tell me they were drawn here by recommendations from friends, books, and the internet, but why pick this option over all the others out there? Surely, part of it is the program's emphasis on technology -- the idea that the approach is a technology, based on research, and not a psychological process.

Clearly, these are people who by dint of their professional training tend to trust pragmatic quantifiable findings. There is not a psycho-therapist in the bunch. I ask one of the staff if we are a typical group; we are.

In an introductory lecture, we meet our two trainers: John Cahill and Charleene Gellenberger.

Charleene, who wears a long blue-green Indian skirt that swings as she moves, explains the week's agenda is about using sound, "as one way to shift your energy. It also gives your brain something to hook onto. The brain learns to compare what this sound feels like compared to that sound." She plays several audio-tape snippets to make her point. Each is made up of three or four overlaid tracks of sound, one of which is Bob's "binaural beat" -- it sounds like the "waah....waah" sound a multi-engine prop plane makes when the propellers are tuned to make sure the engines are running at the same speed. John explains that each ear gets a slightly different frequency and the two frequencies are then synchronized by the brain's two hemispheres, and heard as the single "waah...waah" sound. Charleene adds that the binaural beat is easy to hear in these demonstration tapes but, in the tapes we will listen to, we may not "hear" it at all. She tells us not to worry about this, because the beat will register on our nervous systems anyway, affect our brains and, in this way, lead us to a particular state of consciousness. John explains that although there is a lot of talk about Alpha waves, the electrical brain rhythms associated with wakeful relaxation, the interesting stuff really happens in the Theta and Delta states, which are associated with creative breakthroughs and spiritual epiphanies. The whole sequence, binaural beat, tonal sounds, and verbal guidance is known as the Hemi-Synch process.

And that is where the tapes are designed to take us. For the next four days, John and Charleene explain, we will be spending most of our time in our CHEC units, listening to multi-layered sounds that will help us get to those states. "Don't limit yourself to what you've heard in the past," Charleene advises. "Bring a fresh new mind to explore what sound can be." As they tell us how to listen, they sat things like "play with it" and "don't take anything too seriously." Once again, I see Bob's hand. He hated pontificating and what he saw as the pretentious seriousness attending so much personal growth work

"Don't be in your left brain," John adds. "Just for the next few days, don't try to figure it out. Just experience it. It's meant to be intuitive. Follow your impulses, highs, lows. Try things, intuitively. I think you'll find interesting things going on."

Charleene comes down the aisle between us, carrying an open box. She explains that for the duration of the program, we will be outside of time. If we have to measure, we should think in terms of lunch breaks. She invites us to put our watches in the box. We make the kind of jokes people do when they are slightly uncomfortable, and don't want to own it. Years ago, I was with the Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert of southwestern Africa. One Bushman who spoke English saw me regularly looking at my watch and told me he liked my "slave bracelet," but would never wear one. It's funny, but I feel a sense of casting off on a voyage when I take my watch off and put it in the box. When Charleene has them all, we go back to the Penn Center.

Dinner is a simple buffet -- lasagna, salad, Jell-O, turkey, and black-eyed peas -- like college dorm fare. Apparently The Monroe Institute, like its founder is not in thrall to what Bob once described to me as "the food nazis." From the beginning, Bob wanted his program to change people's consciousness not their diets. He also wanted to make sure no one felt excluded. It is possible to be happy as a carnivore or a vegetarian here, and seeing this several people visibly relax.

After dinner, we gather for a few moments in a room with a white carpet. We're told not to focus on out-of-body experiences. Only a very small minority ever experience "Type 1 OBEs", John says, the kind where you turn around and see yourself -- autoscropy -- is the formal term. "What each of you *will* experience," he adds, "is a 'Type 2' where the focus of your consciousness seems independent of your body." If anyone is disappointed by this statement, it does not show, and the honesty of it impresses me. As I know from experience -- I've had one spontaneous OBE, and two willed ones over the years -- and from reading decades of research, autoscopic OBEs are not only rare but often scary. Even in that split second when one is about to occur, the fear barrier -- that flash of primordial panic at the prospect of irrevocable separation from one's physical body -- is a very high hurdle to overcome, and few make it.

I'm lying in my little cubicle. I've got my lights adjusted to a deep blue red twilight. I don't know why; it just seems like the right color. Soft New Age music comes out of speakers I hadn't noticed earlier. I feel like an astronaut waiting for a launch.

The music has stopped.

Charleene's voice comes softly through my headphones, telling me we have been listening to "meta-music," that has a binaural beat. Something called *Prizms*. I fiddle in the dark with the controls on the cord of my headphones to get the levels balanced just right.

The sound changes to soft swoosh of surf.

Now I hear deep bass sounds. And then Bob's voice -- and the years roll away. The familiar distinctive voice tells me to create a box -- my Energy Conversion Box -- and put all my cares in it. Slowly, something like Tibetan chanting comes up. I've always liked chanting. That sense of feeling it inside my head. Now Bob's voice comes in, still very strange to hear -- dis-embodied and yet, over this high quality sound system, crystal clear. He encourages me to use my vocal chords as loudly as I want to tune myself with the voices. Resonant Tuning, he calls it. I sink into what I know from years of meditation is the Theta state, a deep level in which it feels like your body isn't there. With the tapes programming my brain, it is as if the skids had been greased. The sounds, the layers, the beat; it is very sophisticated. What I would estimate is about 40 minutes later, we are brought back.

After each session, there is a debrief. One woman describes meeting a relative who had recently died. Another man had powerful images of special places in his life. Several admit they fell asleep, and are sheepish. John tells us, not to worry: The sounds are designed to take us down into a hypnagogic state, the twilight world just before one falls asleep, and keep us on that edge. "If your body needs the rest," John tells us, "it pushes you through to sleep." Everyone appreciates hearing that.

Next, we're told, they're going to play tapes over the speakers during the night to try to head off jet lag. We all come from different time zones, but as John explains it, sounds on the tapes will regulate our brain activity so that we are all in sync: We'll all be at the same point in our sleep cycle by the time we wake up. I don't know what time it is, close to midnight I'd guess, when I go to bed. I'll be curious to see if this synchronization business works.

"This day I will take authority over my body." I'm awake. Sort of. Who knows what time it is. I have no sensation of my body lying there, listening to Bob's voice. How long has he been speaking? "All the parts of your body are functioning properly... this day is the most important day of your life. This is a day to be perfect in." I'm wide awake as he counts down from 10 to 1. A series of tones - little beats - very regular, follow. Then more tones. Electronic, clanky cable car music that makes me smile. The tones fade out, and slow quiet music takes its place. Just on the edge of my hearing, I'm aware of the binaural beat. This is Monday morning. I don't know what time it is but, judging by the light outside, it's earlier than I would normally wake up, and John was right, I feel great.

There are only a few of us at the morning exercise program run by Larry Lorrence, a gently humorous man who still speaks in his native Czechoslovakian

accent. He's good; I was told he has been a trainer for decades and his program, a mix of small weights and stretching, shows it. Like everything else here, it's inclusive, getting the job done without straining those who don't exercise. To me this exercise period is as important as anything in the program, since so much of the time we're going to be lying down.

At breakfast most people also seem to confirm last evening's claim. No one I talk to has jet lag, and most tell me they woke up feeling rested. Everyone seems happy. Afterwards, we gather and talk more about the Energy Conversion Box, Resonant Tuning, and the importance of the affirmation that will come up in this session. It begins, "I am more than a physical body...." This is the only bit of dogma in the program, and even it is presented very tentatively. "Consider the proposition that you are more than a physical body", is the oblique way John introduces it. Almost as an aside, Charleene mentions that because of the verbal suggestions built into the tapes that our bodies will be balanced, and will properly eliminate, we'll probably go to the bathroom far more frequently than usual. We end with a discussion of what Bob called Focus 10, a state in which the body is asleep yet the mind stays fully awake. He named and numbered each of the progressively deeper levels he and his test subjects discovered. Someone asks if Focus 10 is like having a lucid dream, and John says no, because this state does not occur during what sleep researchers call Rapid Eye Movement or REM sleep, the time when we dream.

Back in my CHEC unit, the sounds begin, and again I am startled by Bob's voice now telling me to go to Focus 10 and "I will meet you there." As if it were a rendezvous at a coffee shop.

This experience is like the one last night. A kind of deep meditation, only I find I can not get down as far as usual. It is the sounds, I realize; they speed you to the point they are designed for, but they also hold you there. It is an odd sensation. I think I fall asleep before it is over, have a hard time waking up, and don't want to wake up.

In the next session we're introduced a new concept, called a Resonant Energy Balloon. Essentially, it is a modern variant of the protection ritual used in many ancient paths: Surrounding oneself with light. Listening to Bob, I realize that he has constructed not just sounds, but a complete systematic technique for entering altered states of consciousness based on principles that go back to history's beginnings.

When we get to the part where we form our balloons, with ourselves in the center, I get a clear picture of a ball forming around me with the density of a light fog. Parallel neon lavender lights, like tubes or glowing wires, are sunk

into its surface from head to toe; sort of like the indented lines of a pumpkin. I get lost exploring this, until my body begins to vibrate and twitch. I have twitches going all over me. Then they pass and I am in a very removed quiet space. Somehow I don't hear the sounds anymore.

During break, I listen to the others. Each of us sees the box and the ball differently. It points up to me the fact that Bob is setting up a kind of biofeedback loop in which brain state and visualization mutually support the same goal, even though the specific images vary from one person to the next.

After the long break at lunch, when some of us jog or walk, we get ready for the next session, and there will be another after that. If the tapes are 40 minutes apiece that means we are in an altered state almost three hours each day. I mention this to John, who replies that sometimes we'll have five sessions a day.

Before the next session, he and Charleene introduce our final protective mechanism, the Energy Bar. If the Energy Balloon is reactive, the Energy Bar is proactive. As we enter other levels of consciousness, it is to ward off hostile energies we sense, to cut loose from parasitic thought forms, to reach out and grab things -- a multipurpose tool for whatever we need. Again, I am fascinated by Bob's adaptation of ancient and powerful symbols. When we do the tape my Energy Bar does look pretty much like a Jedi light saber, but without the metal gadget in my hand.

We are midway through the debrief when I suddenly realize that in all this time there hasn't been a single word about spirit. No mention, although it is entirely implied. Bob has designed a program that doesn't leave anybody out. A fundamentalist Christian, a Tibetan Buddhist, and an atheist would not find anything to offend. I think I also see another reason why the seminars are attractive to men. There's no emphasis on feelings per se; it's a technology, we're learning, not a way to verbally process.

Over the next three days the sounds take us to more and more profound levels -- Focus 12, Focus 15. The numbering seems arbitrary and a little too pat at first but then, I realize that Bob, ever the empiricist, systematically defined them from the hundreds of firsthand reports he got from test voyagers in his old laboratory, as he changed a frequency here, added a beat there. I remember those late-night sessions, and his probing questions: "Kid, how are you? Where did you go? What did you see? How did it feel, Kid?" The appeal of this system is that it does not demand a specific universal response. For a group, going to Focus 12 is like everyone going to Arizona but, it is clear from the highly personal accounts at the debriefings, we don't all go to Tucson.

We learn today we will end with Focus 21. I had stopped being a late-night test subject long before Bob had worked out the sound mix for that one, but I remember him later saying it was at Focus 21 that people began reporting experiences as “beyond time-space.” I am excited by the prospect.

One afternoon, after lunch, we go over to the Robert Monroe Research Laboratory on campus, where the sounds are mixed, the tapes are made, and research continues. It is run by a genial ex-military intelligence officer, Skip Atwater, and is a much more impressive version of the old sleep lab set-up Bob used. They have built a very sophisticated CHEC unit, that blocks out all electrical emanations with copper shielding in the walls, ceiling, and floor -- a radio will not play inside. The small space also provides almost total sensory deprivation and is also wired for full EEG monitoring.

Atwater, understandably proud of his set up, says that the Monroe Institute is doing carefully designed research which is being submitted for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals; exactly what is needed if Bob’s work is to be taken seriously in fields such as medicine. He also says it is possible to make arrangements to have “custom sessions” in the special CHEC unit. Apparently they are popular with creative people who have a specific creative goal to accomplish.

“Here in the lab we provide people with a combination of sound patterns that shape their brain waves into producing states of intuitive consciousness,” he explains. “We monitor them in real-time, using devices very similar to polygraphs, and this allows us to shape the session as it is happening.” He holds up a kind of cloth skull cap, much like an old-fashioned bathing cap, only this one is studded with electrodes, and trails dozens of multi-colored wires. He puts it on and, looking very bizarre, says, “We like to train people to recognize consciously when an intuitive moment happens by teaching them how to feel this intuitive sense. It’s a skill you can learn.”

Skip gets more enthusiastic as he talks, explaining that the important thing is one can learn to prolong this intuitive state. It doesn’t have to be just an intuitive flash. “You can learn to explore your intuitive knowledge simply by expanding that intuitive impulse so it is not just a couple of seconds but a few minutes. When you do that, you can have a very different kind of a world. I’m not just saying the physical world we live in but a world, a dimension, that will give answers and understanding.”

Someone asks what he thinks is the most important thing people learn from the Monroe program, and Skip responds, “People come to know, *not just believe*, that they’re more than their physical bodies and knowing you’re more than your physical body is the beginning of knowing that you survive physical death. And

knowing that is a tremendous relief. Because if you know you survive physical death, you are free from humankind's most fundamental fear." As we walk back, I am struck again and again with the power of that statement.

After leaving the lab we go to a lecture by Joe McMoneagle, who shows a video of himself doing a remarkably accurate Remote Viewing under the very trying conditions of a "do-or-die" broadcast television program. Remote Viewing is a psychic ability which allows someone to describe people, places, or events from which he or she is shielded either by time or space -- something in the past or something in the future, or something at a distance. The only way to get the answers being sought is through psychic perception, what we in the research community now call Anomalous Cognition. I have been doing research in this area for about 25 years, and Joe is one of the most gifted remote viewers I've ever met. He tells us that he uses some of the techniques he has learned from Bob's tapes, to "cool down" from the stresses of the day, before he begins a remote viewing session.

Late on Tuesday, as I am lying in my CHEC unit, a searing pain pierces my left knee. It was injured in a parachute accident during the 60s, when I was in the service. The pain is followed by the sense that warm honey is pouring over my knee making the pain disappear. My leg jumps involuntarily several times and, then I have a sense of well-being. When I go to the debrief, before I can say anything about this, another participant, Bonnie, comes up to me. She tells me that during the session she felt a strong sense that I needed healing, and so she sent healing to me. Amazed, I tell her what happened at my end, and thank her for her help.

Problem solving, Focus 12, a new level. The sessions have broken into two patterns. First you get sounds with Bob's voice providing guidance; then you get a session where you try what you've learned with the help of the sounds. I can tell from people's descriptions things that by going to a specific state of awareness again and again, the brain does learn the routine; it becomes easier. John explains that once that happens, some people don't really need a specific tape, except to re-tune. Since the Institute has a business selling tapes, his candor is admirable.

We are all deeply settled into the regime now. Clothes are down to the most casual and comfortable; I really think you could do the entire program in your pajamas, and many of us have given up wearing shoes, except to go outdoors. Everybody is journalizing; we all walk around with our notebooks and pens, keeping track of what we are experiencing. Everybody's also going to the bathroom like crazy, just as Charleene predicted.

Wednesday morning, John and Charleene explain that today we are going to do three sessions with no debriefing in between -- just short breaks to go to the bathroom. Hearing this, I realize, I am getting "taped out," and can see that I am not alone. Strangely, though, in spite of the hours spent lying down in a darkened room, I am not having trouble sleeping. I have, however, begun having headaches -- very unusual for me. John says this often happens, because the greatly increased brain activity "throws off your electrolyte balance." He gets me a glass of Gatorade, and 20 minutes later the headache is gone.

Focus 15. Each time, the sounds give me the sensation of moving along a greased rail as they change, and a new layer of pulsing is added to the mix. This one has a swishing sound like the take off of a rocket. Focus 15 is described as the "State of No Time," and on this it delivers. My awareness expands into a realm where I am not only unaware of my body, but in a kind of endless "now."

I am a tone, and the vibration is changing.

A slowing tune.

Follow the sound.

Change of the pulse, a little of the "waah...waah" -- Bob says let the vibration move up faster and faster.

We're returning to time, back to focus 12, where time has full sway. It's weird but I feel it lock on.

"You will overcome all those things which might hinder your body's best physical, mental, spiritual functioning. The body physical will function properly. The eliminations will be increased so as to bring the best state. The mental will build the best moral physical forces for the body. Circulation will remove strain to the nervous system. The organs of the system will assimilate and secrete properly under normal conditions for your body. The nerve supplies of the whole body will assume their normal courses. Vitality will be restored in them. The spiritual elements of the physical forces, perfectly normal, particularly balanced and equalized will be the condition when you return to the physical waking state. Perfectly normal, perfectly balanced, perfectly equalized." Now I follow the sound down back to my normal waking consciousness. Bob has anticipated my being "taped out" and given me a new experience.

During the break we are told to go out and walk by ourselves, and it is a very good idea. I walk into a field where there are eight big hay rounds. Then down along an almost obliterated unused farm road of red clay. Everything is intensely green and, in the solitude of the deep woods, I stand very still. After a moment the insects return to their rising and falling symphony. Maybe because I have been sensitized by the tapes, I can hear the patterns embedded in the sound. First one species solos, then another, then they come together. There is a deep regularity about it, much like the tapes. Did Bob model his work on these sounds, I wonder, or is this the pulse of consciousness at whatever level?

Focus 21. I am deep inside myself, when I feel I may not be breathing. Am I having a heart attack? I reach up to touch my chest and can't get my arm to move. I am very weak. My body and my etheric body are disconnecting. A part of my mind spirals off into a familiar intellectual debate over whether the idea of the etheric body is just a metaphysical concept or a proven quantifiable reality. But interspersed with those thoughts is this absolute experience, and it makes the debate moot. I am in a space where "I" have almost ceased to exist. I can hear and see nothing, but it is very different from just closing your eyes. Then, I become aware that I am somewhere, and I can see even though my eyes are still closed.

Deep space is silent. What stands out are the colors. It isn't just black and white. It feels more impersonal than cold. I'm having trouble holding the image. I'm not that visual. It's more a sense of knowing. I am not alone. Just on the edge of my perception I can feel, like the brush of a butterfly's wing, the linkage we all have one to another, and to the greater unifying whole. There is an absolute knowing that this is true. Just a little further and I could break through the silence into what I know is the sound of life. A tone breaks into my awareness, instead. Another one, and I am back in my body.

When I come back it takes a long while to return to normal consciousness. When I attempt to stand up to, I can just barely do it. I am incredibly clumsy, and stumble around in my tiny space. I pick up my ring and drop it. The same thing happens with my glasses. When I try to get my pants on, I fall over onto the bed. Finally, more or less together, I go upstairs. A number of other people, have had similar sorts of experiences. Uli falls down the stairs. Bernard is feeling very woozy. I begin to develop another one of those electrolyte imbalance headaches. We go into lunch, and the only food I can conceive of eating is a salad. It takes me almost the entire meal to get myself grounded, feeling fully back into my body. I tell the people at my table that the second session seemed particularly powerful and there is laughter. I thought the tapes ran the whole time during Focus 21, and find out that they only ran for little pieces of it.

After lunch we have a ceremony, and Laurie Monroe, Bob's eldest daughter and the Institute's Director, gives us each a certificate that we have completed the course. No one is very serious.

Later, after being counseled to drive carefully -- most are staying another day to decompress -- I leave to head back to West Virginia. It is dark, with little to see, and I think about the week realizing that something genuinely profound has happened. I try to get a sense of what the program really offered. This is what I come to: Gateway Voyage is not really about OBEs. It is about learning an inner path based on sound. If I had never meditated, this experience would have taken me to states of consciousness normally not reached until you had meditated regularly for about six years -- at least in my case. The sounds teach the brain how to go to those depths. Bob Monroe, unlike say L. Ron Hubbard, did not create a movement or a religion; his goal was not to give people answers, only tools. Ultimately, though, even equipped with these new tools, I face the same challenges I did at the beginning of the week; only my intent and ideals determine where I go from here.